

Members Sign Letter Expressing Concern About Chevron Efforts to Yank Ecuador's Trade Benefits

Washington D.C. - Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-CA) and 25 other Members of Congress are urging the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to reject efforts by Chevron to threaten the cancellation of trade benefits for Ecuador because the oil giant faces a multi-billion dollar liability in the South American nation for allegedly dumping billions of gallons of toxic oil waste into the rivers and streams of the Amazon rainforest.

A letter sent December 15 to USTR Ambassador Ron Kirk, says: "We write to express our concern about news reports indicating that Chevron Corporation continues to request that the United States Trade Representative (USTR) withhold U.S. trade preferences for Ecuador. We urge you to reject Chevron's request and reaffirm that U.S. trade agreements will not be used as leverage to interfere in private claims processing through Ecuador's legal process."

"Chevron pushing the Administration to take the extraordinary step of yanking special trade preferences for Ecuador turns the goal of the U.S. trade preferences program on its head," said Rep. Linda Sánchez. "Trade preferences should be used as a hand up to provide needed help to the families of developing nations, not a paddle to punish governments who refuse to succumb to the demands of multi-billion dollar corporations."

When it came to her attention that Chevron had been lobbying Members of Congress and the Obama Administration to punish Ecuador because its government refused to intervene in a private lawsuit, Rep. Linda Sánchez began an awareness campaign. Testifying before the Ways & Means Trade Subcommittee hearing on trade preference systems, Sánchez advocated for tens of thousands of indigenous Ecuadorians who have been seeking remediation from Chevron for more than fifteen years from a human and environmental tragedy to have their day in court. The population in the affected area suffers from high rates of cancer and birth defects, and too many mothers have experienced miscarriages and the loss of a child.

"Rather than allowing this case to come to a conclusion, embarking on clean-up efforts, or even seeking mediation, Chevron has engaged in a lobbying effort that looks like little more than extortion," continued Sánchez. "Apparently, if it can't get the outcome it wants from the Ecuadorian court system, Chevron will use the U.S. government to deny trade benefits until Ecuador 'cries uncle.'"

Rep. Sánchez and her colleagues write: "We do not prejudge the outcome of the case, nor do we take a position on the litigation. We do believe, however, that the tens of thousands of indigenous residents of Ecuador who have brought this case deserve their day in court. We further believe that the USTR should not interfere in an ongoing judicial matter, particularly when this case involves environmental, health and human right issues that have a regional, and even global, importance."

[Click here to read a recent LA Times editorial on this issue, Trading with Ecuador.](#)

Full text of the letter is below:

December 14, 2009

The Honorable Ron Kirk
United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20508

Re: Ecuador's Inclusion in Andean Trade Preferences Benefits

Dear Ambassador Kirk:

We are writing to express our concern about news reports indicating that Chevron Corporation continues to request that the United States Trade Representative (USTR) withhold U.S. trade preferences for Ecuador. We understand that this request arises as part of an effort to quiet a legal claim brought against Chevron by some 30,000 Ecuadorians who reside in Ecuador's northeastern Amazon region. We urge you to reject Chevron's request and reaffirm that U.S. trade agreements will not be used as leverage to interfere in private claims progressing through Ecuador's legal process.

For nearly four years, Chevron Corporation has made similar requests of the United States Trade Representative's Office (USTR). To its credit, USTR has rejected them. A judgment is expected sometime next year by the Ecuadorian court in a civil case in which the Ecuadorian plaintiffs allege that Texaco, subsequently acquired by Chevron dumped billions of gallons of toxic waste water into unlined pits and waterways in Ecuador's Amazon forests while drilling for oil, resulting in severe human health and environmental problems in the region.

We do not prejudge the outcome of the case, nor do we take a position on the litigation. We do believe, however, that the tens of thousands of indigenous residents of Ecuador who have brought this case deserve their day in court. We further believe that the USTR should not interfere in an ongoing judicial matter, particularly when this case involves environmental, health and human right issues that have regional, and even global, importance.

We appreciate your consideration of our request that you continue your past policy of allowing the case against Chevron to unfold without pressure from the USTR. We look forward to hearing from you soon. Should you have any questions on this matter, please contact Celeste Drake in the office of Congresswoman Linda T. Sánchez.

Sincerely,

Linda T. Sánchez (CA-39)
Lloyd Doggett (TX-25)
Danny Davis (IL-7)
John Lewis (GA-5)
Jim McDermott (WA-7)
Earl Blumenauer (OR-3)
Bill Delahunt (MA-10)

Sam Farr (CA-17)
Raul Grijalva (AZ-7)
Phil Hare (IL-17)
Brian Higgins (NY-27)
Steve Israel (NY-2)
Hank Johnson (GA-4)
Marcy Kaptur (OH-9)
Barbara Lee (CA-9)
Betty McCollum (MN-4)
Jim McGovern (MA-3)
Michael Michaud (ME-2)
James Moran (VA-8)
Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC)
John Olver (MA-1)
Mike Quigley (IL-5)
Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-34)
Jan Schakowsky (IL-9)
Pete Stark (CA-13)
Betty Sutton (OH-13)

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